



The Gleaner
2013-2014

Cover Artwork:

Jersey Sky  *Michelle Welliver*

The Gleaner

As this issue of The Gleaner represents, we are going through *Transformations*.

Just like Delaware Valley College, we are growing and broadening our scope and vision.

This 2013-2014 issue represents a number of firsts for us:

- *Conceptualized an issue based on a theme*
- *Designed the print layout on our own*
- *Published our first off-campus undergraduate submission*
- *Launched our first interactive website*

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For the future...

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For this issue we have chosen to use the Latin letter for "G" to represent *The Gleaner*.

The Gleaner is a theme-based literary journal edited by the undergraduate students at Delaware Valley College.

We showcase all forms of written work as well as artwork and photography pieces.

This year's theme is *Transformations*.



Jersey Sky  *Michelle Welliver*



[7] Stolen

[8] Apologia

[9] Rearing

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Stolen

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Leslee Blahut

Kaleidoscope canopy
glitters okra, saffron.
Shushing. Rustling.
Filigree beads of sunshine
beg trespass into this world
where hazel fades to brown,
where sun-spray speckles on skin,
where freckle-peppered shoulders
are tempted to blush and ankles
are taunted by the milkweed's tickle.
Here is where promises linger
in pollen-soaked air;
new vows unveiled to the
clickbeat of the cricket's song.
But a sudden switch and bolt
of a tail sends bending boughs
with the weight of wings
to shudder with shaking, spring-
ing release. Gracious
as a thunderclap, their sunkiss retires
as tragedy of twilight encroaches,
banishing them to bed until tomorrow.

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Apologia

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Thaddeus Schickling

That simple, but strong word giving
life to a
hope not seen by
Freud or Russel. But lived
by Jesus and Paul. That sensitive
ear, willing to listen to the whispers and
shouts of doubt. Defending that which is
inside rather than out. As if to ask the
questions that awaken
the heart.

But instead of double blind tests and independent
variables, testing the heart, the mind. Not just the
heart, but the mind with it. Intellect and
emotion bonded as one.

This world seems filled with pointless suffering,
evil on the loose with neither purpose nor person
to stop it. But Apologia calls a charge forward
instead of backward, to justify the
unjustifiable.

Resurrecting evil from the grave and
breathing new life. Evil is
the siren to awaken
a dead world.

It forces us to hear the call of
Jericho road.

And through ministries of mercy we push back
the forces of evil. Hoping, praying and
building the City of God.

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Rearing

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Leslee Blahut

And it's kind of a funny little thing
Was never told it'd be this hard
Tempers, tantrums, skinned knees that sting
And it's kind of a funny little thing
That my patience is what needs practicing
To count to ten and then restart
And it's kind of a funny little thing
Was never told it'd be this hard.

And it's kind of a funny little thing
how it was never endearing before:
A bump, a bruise, skinned knees that sting
and it's kind of a funny little thing,
when cats are curled and tots lie dreaming,
foreheads sweaty, small snores I adore.
And it's kind of a funny little thing,
how it was never endearing before.

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[11] Whale Beach

[18] Evening Strolls

[28] It's Complicated

[34] Game of Life

[39] The Legacy of a Chestnut Tree

Whale Beach

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Leslee Blahut

He shuffled slowly in his naked feet. The gravel road with its jagged pebbles was no match for those callused soles. Gusts whistled out of the south and demanded his silver wisps to stand in opposition. Pale blue and lousy with holes, the tattered edges of his sweater clung desperately to his bony frame. Through bloodshot, he scanned the horizon that lay ahead and watched the pillowing grey clouds plump and roll closer towards him. Crooked telephone poles and lamp posts lined the road as it narrowed and trailed off into the distance. A nasty storm however many years ago had swooped in and damn near broke almost every last dome shade so that now the poles just stood there tall and starkly underdressed.

This used to be a quaint little town where familiar families would arrive every year in late spring

and take up residence in the humble roadside cottages with their blue and white gingham kitchen curtains and worn front porch rockers. The sun was a buoyant saucer in the sky for what seemed like every single endless day of the summer. The fishy sea air would lie on your skin like an invisible salty film, and then somehow, by the end of the day, it would transform itself into a chalky layer, so thin you could just gently carve a lover's initialed heart into it with a keen fingernail. It was only when the sun began to dip early and the air acquired an unshakable chill that the summer guests would stack their wicker chairs inside, button up the shutters, and head back to wherever home was until next season. But all that changed when greedy builders decided to turn the little strip of land adjacent to this sleeper town into a hotbed for summer crowds. Anxious beachcombers looking for a quick

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cut-through route to start their weekly vacations would flock over the rickety one-lane bridge and kick up the dust and gravel with their too big cars containing their too big families to settle into their too big houses for which they paid too much money.

As he made his way past the bridge and down the road, Mott glanced at the now-abandoned shacks with their ripped and skewed shutters and battered frames. Slivers of dilapidated siding flapped wildly while the overgrown sunflower corpses woefully hung their heads. He crinkled the edges of his mouth in bewildered amusement. Such were the snippets of life he could vividly recall: random families, the creak of a rocking chair, faded gingham curtains. These ineffectual nothings filled his brain with such clarity, but the other stuff—the important stuff of his livelihood, the faces of his family, his son’s name—had found their way through the drainage holes of his memory so that all he had left were half-hearted recollections and unfinished anecdotes.

He neared the steps embedded in

the dune and braced himself on the wooden railing, to catch his breath. The reeds were tall now as he stood next to them and felt their itchy tickle on his knees and elbows. No more a lush green, they had already begun their descent into a somber shade of amber, and soon they’d be ready to bolt and go to seed for yet another year. He mounted each step slowly as he held the splintered wood under his gnarly grip. The undersides of his hands had a silky paper-like quality to them, and there was something almost soothing to their touch, if you had ever had the occasion.

Under his feet the sand was soft as he made his way onto the beach and past the broken brown picket fence. He saw in his mind that day those three young boys kicked the pickets until they folded like matchsticks. Mott remembered how he scowled at the boys as they reveled in their savage joy from using the wooden carcass as swords for the remainder of what should have been his peaceful day on the beach. He continued to trudge along now and finally dropped his body



into a weary heap on a cool, grainy mound. Although the clouds were knitted tightly above and the breeze was swift, the old man felt flushed and thankful for the mist as it gently lay on his scruffy face.

He brought his knees to his chest and tugged the sweater over them like a blanket. A gaping softball size hole let the crisp air seep in and crudely rush under his legs. The dirty loops of knitting had been broken and frayed beyond what nimble fingers and knots could repair. He'd have to ask Mare to bring out the sewing kit to darn it for him. He wondered if you darned sweaters. Was it only socks that were darned? He couldn't remember. Either way, he'd ask her to fix it for him. Oh, how she'd been so proud that day she brought home the yarn. "I'm making you a sweater," she said with eyes wide and that voice of determination she roused whenever she took on a new project. "I am, and you will wear it all the time. It will be fabulous!" Her excitement faded when she learned that she couldn't cast off correctly, and some of the rows had a tighter knit than others, and the lengths

between the front and back were grossly uneven, which made the edges look horribly off and crooked. She'd cursed that god-damned sweater and cried with frustration at least a half dozen times, and yanked out rows upon rows upon rows, and even threw it in the waste basket a few times and told him, "he could just go buy a god-damned sweater from someone who knew what the hell they were doing". But she eventually finished it. And he wore it. And it was fabulous.

He hadn't heard her voice in some time. She never spoke to him anymore these days. He would say things like, "I'm going to have eggs this morning. Doesn't that sound good?" He'd speak to her about eggs, about the Piping Plovers that had chosen the local stretch of beach for mating and how the whole left end was roped off so no one would disturb them. He'd speak about all kinds of things, but she wouldn't respond. He'd go home today and nicely request out loud that she fix his sweater. "Mare, honey, do you think you could ah...do you think you could maybe fix my



sweater? It's got this big hole in it and, and I keep makin' it bigger when I reach for my pockets and..." He'd ask her to fix it. To fix the sweater she'd once so lovingly and painstakingly knitted for him. But she probably wouldn't. She didn't do anything for him anymore.

A frothy edge crept over his toes as the tide came further up the beach. The ocean's surface was angry and moving with a fierce volume that only accompanied the really spectacular storms, and as the waves raged in front of him, he was enamored by the delicately scalloped outline of twisted seaweed and broken shells left in their wake. A seagull stealthily landed and began to graze on a dead horseshoe crab that had come to rest beside him. The old man watched as the bird needled his beak in and out of the crab's crevices, poking and jabbing with every millisecond, flipping its lifeless crusty body over and over to get every last bit possible before casually meandering down the beach to find its next prize. How carefree he was, just dropping in to sample the fare, and then off again when he'd picked it clean and knew it

had nothing left to offer him.

Mott dug his hands down into the wet sand and felt the gritty coldness pass through his fingers. He felt the space between his fingertips and his nails fill with the thickness as he curled his fingers into a fist. He lifted his hand and outstretched his grip towards the sky and looked at the remaining thin cake of sand that had been separated by the unique creases of his palm. "Let's build a sand castle, Dad," he heard his son exclaim in his tiny almost four-year-old voice. "Ok, sure, let's do that." And for at least an hour on that warm summer day they filled their red bucket with moist sand over and over and made a castle of two levels with a moat that surrounded it so they would be safe. He showed his son how he could make pointed tops on the castles by taking a pinch of wet sand and slowly dropping bits of it at a time as he raised his hand in one fluid motion. His little boy was delighted and clapped his hands wildly in amazement. He then got the giggles and demolished the castle as if he were Godzilla and landed in hysterics with



his knees resting in the soupy puddle. Mott became furious and scolded his son for ruining their creation. "Why would you do that? We've been working for hours, why would you be so inconsiderate?" The old man winced as the scene played in his mind. What kind of a monster yells at a child for bulldozing a sand castle? Why did he care about such an inconsequential thing?

He wiped the corners of his eyes and let the wind dry his cheeks. He would call his son tonight. He'd apologize for the castle, for his temper, for all the things he was sure he had done over the years but couldn't remember now. He hoped that wretched woman wouldn't answer the phone again when he called. She always refused to put his son on the phone, and she told Mott he didn't know who he was talking to—she wasn't going to deal with this any longer. Then her voice would become sharp and shrill and she'd eventually hang up on him and not pick up when he'd dial the number again and again and again. One time she even called the police on him and lodged a complaint of

harassment. They followed up and paid him a visit at his home, but Mott said she must have been crazy. What harassment? He didn't know what she was talking about.

The sky began to deepen just enough for the lamp posts to flicker with life. A droplet of rain fell randomly on the old man's nose, then a few more on his eyelashes. He hugged his knees for warmth and pushed his feet and ankles into the sand to shield them from the cold. Behind him he heard the murmur of an engine and the sound of heavy tires on sand. The red and white patrol car gently came to a crawl, and then with a whistling squeak of the brakes, the murmur calmly shifted to idle. He heard the car door open and a jangling of keys and then a young man's voice said, "Evenin', Mr. Mott. Everything okay tonight?" Without interrupting his gaze of the sea, the old man picked up his hand and gave a cursory wave of acknowledgement.

"So, it's uh, it's getting dark now...you probably be best heading home soon." The



patrolman waited for Mott to react, to say something, to raise his hand again. But he got nothing.

"Mr. Mott? I think it's time you..."

"Yep," the old man muttered quietly.

"Yea? You're gonna head home then?" he said while nodding his head in agreement with himself. He paused to glance quickly at his partner in the passenger seat and rolled his eyes in dismay.

"So, okay then. You go ahead and go home. Okay? You got that, Mr. Mo..."

"Yep."

"Alright then. 'Night." And with a one-two tap on the roof of the cruiser, he quickly folded himself back into his seat and shut the door. He looked at the other cop and gestured his index finger in a circular motion at his temple, "Crazy old man."

The new officer looked at Mott through his passenger side window.

"So, do we do anything here? Do we take him home or call his family or something?"

"Nah. No family to call." His voice was dry. "Something happened to his kid a long time ago. Not sure what, accident or something." He fastened his seatbelt and turned on the windshield wipers. "His wife died too about ten years ago. So he just kind of roams around, talkin' about who knows what, getting nuttier as the days go by."

His partner shifted uncomfortably in his seat. "But shouldn't we, I don't know, make sure he gets home safe or something?"

The patrolman adjusted the rearview mirror and smoothed his windblown hair, then he put his foot on the brake and reached for the gear shifter. He looked through the spotted windshield at the hunched outline that sat before him and for a fleeting moment, he thought of his own home. He envisioned himself tip-toeing up the stairs, poking his head into the rooms of his sleeping children and watching their chests slowly move up and down. He'd hear their tiny voices babbling in dreams as he kissed them goodnight.

He shrugged his shoulders and cleared his throat. "You really think it matters anymore?"

There was a clink as the gears shifted into drive. Over the softly packed sand, the cruiser eased down the access path, past the grassy dunes, and into the faint lamplight of the quiet gravel road.

Evening Strolls

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Leslee Blahut

The time read half past seven when he checked his watch. Pausing for a moment, his finger still resting on the pushed-up cuff of his sleeve, Mr Crowley anticipated a few more droplets on the glass face of his timepiece. He fancied late autumn rains during his night time strolls through the gloom of Connelly Square. Walking quietly by himself, he could watch the reflection of lamplight pass along in the moist shininess of his shoes. He dodged couples crouched tightly under umbrellas while taking special care not to step on the cracks in the pavement. It was a skill he'd grown quite proud of mastering over the years.

The storefronts were lit brightly from within as Mr Crowley turned the corner of McIlIney and Pearce. Wrap-around bars and tables of popular pubs burst with cackling strangers and lonely bedfellows hoping to find

a home for the night. Mr Crowley had no interest in gathering for a pint with colleagues or joining acquaintances for dinners that would be accompanied by conversation as bland as the potatoes. Instead he chose to close out his files for the day, turn out his desk lamp, and exit through the office side door without mentioning a word to anyone. On one rare occasion the red-headed office clerk named Samuel asked him to join the group.

"Hey, whatever-your-name-is, want to come along for a quick one with us?"

"No," Mr Crowley said as swift as the door that closed behind him. No invitations were extended after that, and he quite preferred it that way.

Mr Crowley settled into a nice pace as he neared a yarn store

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nestled between a brick wall and souvenir shop. Outside sat a scraggly-bearded man on an overturned paint bucket, his back towards the cardigans and cloaks so neatly displayed in the window. His violin case lay open on the walk, exposing its purple insides sparkling from the precipitation as he played *Claire de Lune* on his violin. An old woman just a few paces ahead of Mr Crowley tossed a coin or two from her purse into the worn velvet as the man screeched his bow through sour notes. Mr Crowley, gaffing at the sight, kept his hands firmly tucked in his pockets and let his fingers jingle the slippery coins inside as he passed by.

The crowd on Pearce Street was beginning to thin as the rain maintained a steady pace. Men and women dashed their damp faces of pursed lips and squinted eyes into the back seats of cabs or began running with the newsprint folded over their heads. A scent of fresh rolls floated past Mr Crowley as the front door bell of Annie's Café rang with a welcoming tone. It was almost quarter to eight and he hadn't had supper yet, so Mr Crowley entered the tiny shop

and took his favorite seat at an empty table in the back by the lavatories.

A young waitress in her mid twenties walked to his table and handed him a menu. Fair in complexion and plain in looks, her name was Lydia, which Mr Crowley found most interesting since he'd originally pegged her for an "Alice" or a "Rose". The name Lydia seemed a bit exotic to him, much more so than a Rose or Alice, and he remembered the first time he'd heard it and the secret excitement it brought him as he sat tucked behind a café table. Lydia's mousy brown hair hung in strings that had fallen from her bun since her shift began seven hours ago. She smiled with tired eyes and slightly crooked teeth and was not exactly a homely girl but not one who would be considered pretty either. Mr Crowley watched her movements as she set out a napkin and cutlery in front of him.

"What do you think, trying something new tonight?" Lydia said gently. Already knowing the answer to her question, she smiled and said she'd return



in just a moment or two. She shoved her order pad under the cinched strings of her apron ties and scurried to the quarreling couple two tables over to see if they needed their coffees or teas refilled.

Mr Crowley watched her move from table to table, her slightly plumpish figure rubbing against the pale blue waitress uniform, her legs looking like two curvy spindles painted a creamy milk white. She began clearing the empty teacups and saucers from the booth across from him. Mr Crowley watched as her cotton uniform tightened around the curve of her buttocks as she reached back and forth, clanging spoons against porcelain. As he watched her hem move up and down, just barely exposing the backside of her knee pits, Mr Crowley began to wonder what might be under Lydia's day clothes. She seemed like a nice girl, he thought. Naïve and with a quiet timidity. Sensible white cotton underpants with maybe a few pink rosebuds scattered about the fabric were what he could assume.

"So, chicken and brussel sprouts,

yes?" Lydia said with an air of certainty as she stood before him, her masked, unbloomed flowers just a few feet across the table from his face. Mr Crowley shifted his eyes from her crotch and pretended to peruse the menu. Then he answered in a way that even shocked himself. "Corned beef sandwich and a soda water," said a confident Mr Crowley and his finger grazed hers as he handed back the menu. He felt proud of himself and hopeful that she would react in a similar fashion. Lydia paused with her mouth slightly open and her crooked teeth exposed, then she smiled politely at him.

"Well, okay then! What's the special occasion?"

Mr Crowley smiled back, unsure how to respond with any answer other than the simple fact that he was making a bold move so he could get a feel of her undergarments. But Mr Crowley was cunning and knew he needed to sweet talk such a young girl into giving him what he wanted.

"It's a new day for me. I've



beaten a sickness, I have. Out with the old and in with the new. Time to live life!" he said with such gusto that even he, himself, was impressed.

"I had no idea," Lydia said with thoughtful breath. "Fabulous news for you! Corned beef, coming up!" and she turned about face and headed for the kitchen.

Mr Crowley felt pleased with the performance he had given. Surely she wouldn't deny his request to accompany him for a drink tonight. After all, it was to be a celebration. He returned to the thoughts of her panties, only now, when he imagined them, they were no longer a matronly white but rather satin or perhaps silk. Silky and soft and printed with leopard or zebra designs, he didn't care which. Mr Crowley loved the feel of silky women's panties on his skin. How they grazed over the stubble of his unshaven chin with much more ease than the harsh fabric of his own undergarments. And did she wear a garter belt to keep her milky white hosiery in place? Or did they have elastic bands on top that made the fleshy part of her

thighs crease and pucker after a long days work? Although he liked the idea of a cold clasp against his upper leg, the snap of elastic made him stiffen with excitement.

"Here you go, sir. Special delivery on a special day," and Lydia slid the sandwich plate towards him with pride.

"Oh, thank you," Mr Crowley said. "Say, this looks delicious!" and he began eating with a ferocious appetite.

Mr Crowley watched Lydia bounce from table to table as he mashed chunks of corned beef between his teeth and washed them down his throat with the fizziness of his soda water. He felt confident and aroused as he imagined her silken animal print sliding back and forth between his thighs after a walk in the rain and a few stiff cocktails in his apartment.

Lydia strode back to his table upon seeing his empty plate and grabbed her order tablet.

She smiled shyly and asked, "I guess you enjoyed it then?"



"Ah, I enjoyed it," replied Mr Crowley through a grin as he dabbed the crumbs from his lips with a napkin, "very much indeed."

"Is that all for tonight or would you like dessert? Or tea?" Lydia was poised to rip the check from its perforation when Mr Crowley spoke in a most uncharacteristic tone. He was smiling unlike any time she'd seen before and it filled the space between them with a tension that made her feel uneasy.

"How 'bout a drink?" he said quickly and with a raised eyebrow that caught Lydia off guard.

"Oh, we don't serve...oh," realizing her mistake, Lydia bit her lip and bowed her head in embarrassment. She shook her head slightly and thanked him for the invitation but time was getting on now and tomorrow was an early open for her. Perhaps next time, she told him.

Mr Crowley felt disappointed and made sure his face expressed as much.

"So much for a celebration, eh,"

he sighed as he tossed his napkin onto the table like a heartbroken fool.

Lydia glanced at the remaining two dinner guests at her other station. They were finishing their apple crumb cake and sipping the last bit of lukewarm tea from their cups. Once they'd settled their bill, her shift would be over and she'd be free to walk home in the rain alone, make herself a cold deviled ham sandwich for dinner and listen to the leaky faucet in her kitchen as it dripped into the dirty aluminum basin.

Lydia, having a knack for feeling guilty and being a bit lonely herself, reluctantly agreed to join Mr Crowley for one celebratory drink. "Just one" she repeated emphatically as she slid on her navy blue slicker and walked along side of him down Pearce Street back towards Connelly Square. The rain had begun to pour down harder than earlier and conversation became tricky as Mr Crowley, in the oddest of fashions, felt the need to jump over every puddle that had formed on the pavement. As they approached the dark



brownstone building, Lydia felt an uneasiness swelling in her stomach. She hadn't realized Mr Crowley's intention was to have drinks in the privacy of what she could only assume was his home. Lydia's nervousness somehow surfaced as an apology for assuming they'd be having their brief celebration in a local pub. A local pub with large swarms of people and background noise and numerous opportunities for quick exits if need be. Mr Crowley's palms felt sweaty as he stood at the front steps of his building and watched Lydia retreat a few paces from him. Thinking quickly and careful not to panic, Mr Crowley summoned a somber tone and sighed deeply.

"I'm sorry, it's just...with the illness and all, I haven't really been out much, never knowing how I would feel and all," Mr Crowley said in a timid voice. Looking at his shoes and shrugging his shoulders with dismay, he continued, "I'm just more comfortable in less public settings I suppose. It's okay, really. I'll just celebrate alone then. I understand if you don't want to." He turned his back to her slowly and mounted the

second step.

What a terribly lonely thing to do on such a night, thought Lydia. She imagined him sitting alone in his dark apartment, drinking a snifter of whiskey at an old wood table in his kitchen, and congratulating himself for beating such a nasty ailment, whichever one it was. Lydia felt awful for making such a rude remark and for forcing this poor man to admit to the fears and limitations his condition had imposed on him.

"No, no. I'm sorry, forgive my rudeness. One drink. I suppose I can come in for one drink to celebrate," and Lydia followed Mr Crowley up the steps and through the door to his apartment.

Inside the one room flat, the air was musty and dank despite the chilly temperature. Lydia hovered in the doorway as Mr Crowley crossed the room and flicked on a glass lamp that adorned the side table just adjacent to the couch. It glowed in amber against a deep green sofa with sunken cushions and worn armrests. A

bed pillow rested on the far end of the sofa along with a folded up blanket, and the idea of having conversation while sitting on Mr Crowley's sleeping quarters seemed dubious, she thought, as he encouraged her again and again to come in and sit down.

Mr Crowley poured two glasses of port and handed one to Lydia. She smiled and tipped her glass to his, bidding him good health. He grinned and nodded back in agreement and then took a long overdue sip. Lydia was hoping to quickly finish her drink while standing near the door, her slicker still wet and dripping little pools of rainwater onto the dirty carpet. But Mr Crowley insisted she take a seat and he hurriedly, and without permission, shimmied her coat off from behind and tossed it onto a kitchen stool so it could dry for a few minutes or hours.

Lydia perched herself on the edge of the sofa cushion, unable to shake the nervousness and chill of the evening from her posture. She held her glass firmly in her hands as her eyes darted throughout the room, searching for a plant or receptacle to empty

its contents into when he wasn't looking. Mr Crowley took a seat next to Lydia and let his leg rest snugly against hers while his fingers walked up and down the hem of her uniform. He winked in response to Lydia's startling and took another big swig from his glass as he became acutely aware of the rustling sound her nylons made on his pantleg. There was something so exciting, he thought, about the warm tingle of a stranger's fleshiness.

As Mr Crowley pressed closer, Lydia could begin to feel his warm breath on her skin. The earlier evening had her wanting to be courteous and kindly, but the stink of his breath nearing her face had perpetuated a queasiness in her bowels, and she began to shiver as she mustered the courage to say goodnight.

"I'm sorry, but I have to go now," Lydia said with a quickness as she arose from her seat and shook off Mr Crowley's fingers from her hosiery. He stood with her almost in unison and softened his voice.

"Oh, but you just got here. Stay. You must stay," insisted Mr Crowley. "It's still raining outside and your coat couldn't possibly be dry yet. Are you chilly?" he asked as his eyes scanned the goosebumps up and down her arms. "I can give you a sweater, here." He took her glass and finished the port himself before clunking it down onto the table. He then grabbed her elbow and escorted her to a closet next to the door.

"Really, Mr Crowley, I don't want a sweater. I just want to go," Lydia said, trying not to plead with him but sounding a bit desperate as she began to wriggle her arm from his grip.

When Mr Crowley opened the closet door, Lydia exhaled an audible sigh of relief. She'd been expecting to see some kind of torture device, like a noose or a burlap bag that he could easily place over her head so she wouldn't see what was coming next or, perhaps even, dead bodies hanging alongside his grey flannel sweaters and neatly pressed dark trench coats. Instead, and to her surprise, she was greeted by a burst of colorful

blouses and cardigans. Lovely floral dresses made of satin or chiffon, not unlike what one might expect to see on display in the windows of the lady shops in town.

"Here you are," Mr Crowley said with a smile and an excitement in his voice as he flicked through the hangers and settled on a yellow cashmere sweater with gold buttons. "This one's my favorite."

Lydia paused with her mouth slightly open, uncertain of exactly what to say to such an offering. It had never occurred to her before now that Mr Crowley could possibly have a wife or girlfriend or anyone other than a mother, for that matter. He had always come in to eat supper alone and had never even spoken to anyone very much with the exception of tonight, of course.

Lydia began to sob at the mere thought of Mr Crowley's intentions. Her mind flooded with horrifying images of his cold hands dressing her in his favorite clothing. How he'd demand that she parade around

the flat for him, his fingers running the length of her nylons. He'd force her to perform sexual favors as he called her some other woman's name, and then finally he'd have his way with her on the dirty sofa as he breathed down her neck with the smell of warm port.

"I don't want to wear this, Mr Crowley, I just want to go," Lydia said with a whimper.

It was in this moment that Mr Crowley seemed strangely unaware that Lydia had spoken. His hand had begun running up and down a floral silk scarf that hung around a pleated red blouse, and he seemed mesmerized, almost entranced, by the feel of it. "It feels so good," he said with his eyes closed, "when I slide this across my bare skin." He slid the scarf off its hanger and began rubbing it over his face, across his cheeks and mouth, then down his neck. He let out a quiet moan as his hands traveled with the scarf down his frontside, and he seemed quite overcome by its silkiness and the thought of freeing himself from his constricting trousers.

The sudden clatter of the front door snapped Mr Crowley from his enjoyment and he opened his eyes to find that Lydia was gone. He could hear her thumping down the staircase, her cry echoing through the hall, as she headed for the street where she would most surely run all the way home in the rain and then cry herself to sleep in an empty bed.

Without hesitation, Mr Crowley closed the front door and turned the lock. He grabbed her glass from the table and gave it a healthy refill. He then went to the kitchen stool and pulled her rain slicker up to his face. Its fragrance was something of plastic and perfume as he inhaled deeply, and he was quickly able to dismiss the thoughts of her panties, as a rain slicker was something he hadn't thought of before.

Mr Crowley walked over to a dresser and set down his glass and Lydia's jacket. After removing his button down shirt, he unclasped his trousers and let them fall to the ground with his undershorts. Sliding his arms into the slicker, Mr

Crowley admired the soft inner lining as it gently warmed his naked arms and thighs. He then opened a tiny dresser drawer and began to ease a pair of carefully chosen baby blue silk panties over his knees and into place, covering his crotch. How wonderful they felt between his inner thighs and against his buttocks as he walked to the closet to select a lovely pastel scarf, a nice complement to his coat, he thought as he marveled at his passing reflection in the mirror.

needed to find a new café to eat supper at tomorrow, that much was certain.

Mr Crowley enjoyed the crinkle and swish of the slicker as he walked back into the kitchen and refreshed his drink. He turned on the small radio he kept on top of the refrigerator, making sure to keep the volume low so he could enjoy the patter of the rain falling outside. Humming along to the familiar tune, Mr Crowley checked his watch. It was only a quarter to eleven. Perhaps he might throw on his pants and head out for another evening stroll, he thought. It was, after all, one of his favorite things to do on an occasion such as this. He imagined it wouldn't be too crowded what with the rain and the time of night and all. And he

It's Complicated

• ✎ •

Abbie Branchflower

[A posh hotel room in the early evening. The curtains are already drawn and make-up and clothes are strewn about the room haphazardly. Five women sit around, talking casually. BRIDGET, around 23, sits in the centre of it all, wearing a tank top that brightly proclaims her "Bride 2 Be." On the bed next to her are SOPHIE and MARIE who are roughly the same age as BRIDGET. On the other bed and a cot are DOROTHY and ANNA.]

ANNA: (with a sigh) I can't believe my baby's going to be married tomorrow....

BRIDGET: (rolling her eyes) How many times are you going to say that Mom?

DOROTHY: Oh Anna, I know what you mean. They seem so young! Of course, I was younger than Bridget....I was only eighteen when I married Matt's father.

ANNA: (thoughtfully) I was twenty. Gosh it seems like so long ago!

DOROTHY: Doesn't it? You know, I only ever dated Georgesometimes I wonder if we should have waited a bit longer, but then we were so in love....

MARIE: That's so romantic! I wish I'd found a husband when I was eighteen.

BRIDGET: Well it's a good thing I didn't! It only took me what, ten tries to find a keeper?

SOPHIE: (rolling her eyes) Oh Marie, you're a hopeless romantic. That stuff never works out.... (with a guilty look at DOROTHY) Well, maybe not never.

DOROTHY: (with a soft sigh) Well hun, it's certainly never as easy as it seems in the fairy tales.

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BRIDGET: Well I'm not looking for a fairy tale. I'm hardly a helpless princess.

SOPHIE: (with a snort) That's for sure! You always seem to be the one wearing the pants.

MARIE: (teasingly) Yeah, watch out Matt!

[A gentle knock at the door disrupts the conversation.]

SOPHIE: Speak of the devil....

BRIDGET: (in a sing-song like voice) Come in!

MATTHEW: (Enters with a smile on his face. He walks swiftly over to BRIDGET and kisses her on the lips, before sitting down next to her)

ANNA: (in a joking tone) Now, now. Save the kisses for tomorrow!

BRIDGET: (in a slightly embarrassed voice) Mom!

DOROTHY: Matthew, I take it you and the boys are all set for tomorrow?

MATTHEW: Mom!

SOPHIE: (giggles) You'd think they were going on a school trip.

BRIDGET: (slaps SOPHIE good-naturedly on the forearm)

SOPHIE: (jokingly) Ow!

BRIDGET: Matt, you have got your vows done, right?

SOPHIE: (in a stage whisper to MARIE) What did I tell you about the pants?

MATTHEW: (with a grin) Actually, yeah. Obviously yours were done last month, although I suppose I'm not supposed to ask—double standards and all (he flashes BRIDGET a smile)

BRIDGET: Mhmm, that's right, better get used to them!

MARIE: (to SOPHIE) You know, I've seen couples together for three times the time these two have known each other and they weren't half as organized.

SOPHIE: (sighs) Ain't it the truth. Wish my boyfriend could get his act together, I'd settle for

a proper anniversary dinner.

MARIE: (in a stage whisper) At least you have a boyfriend; I'm stuck with Bridget's Great Uncle Jim as my "date."

BRIDGET: (teasing) Well it's not like you brought anyone else! Maybe you'll hit it off!

MARIE: (grabs a perfectly plump pillow and whacks BRIDGET over the head with it, giggling) I hope you know you deserved that!

SOPHIE: Hey now, he's getting better! He only called you Alice five times last night!

MARIE: Yeah but he spilled his wine on me twice!

BRIDGET: (with a snort) At least he didn't puke this time.

MATTHEW: (rolls his eyes and, sarcastically) Honestly, you three are so cruel to dear old Uncle Jim.

BRIDGET: Oh right. So it was out of the goodness of your heart that you forgot to mail his invitation?

MATTHEW: (With an exaggerated air of offense) That was an accident!

BRIDAL PARTY: (in unison)
Uhuhhhh

ANNA: You know, I'm going to pretend I can't hear you talking about Jimmy like that!

BRIDGET: Mom, you tried to tell him we weren't having Thanksgiving last year!

DOROTHY: (with a gasp and slightly shocked expression) Anna, you didn't?!

ANNA: Oh, wait 'til you meet him Dorothy, he's a nutcase and a half.

SOPHIE: Not to mention creepy! No wonder none of his girlfriends ever stuck around.

MARIE: So Matt, why'd you let Bridget find that invitation? This is all your fault.

MATTHEW: (with a faux bow towards the ladies) Just trying to keep the family peace.

BRIDGET: (leans up to kiss MATTHEW on the cheek) You're the best, really.

SOPHIE: (Pretends to gag)

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BRIDGET: Don't think I didn't see that!

[BRIDGET's cell phone rings]

BRIDGET: (looks down at her phone and frowns) It's the caterer (answers the phone) Hello, Bridget Stern.

SOPHIE: (leans towards BRIDGET, in a teasing tone) Don't you means Mrs Matthew Hudson?

BRIDGET: (with the phone pressed against her ear and a warning glare) Oh shut up (listens) Um, okay. Yeah I guess salmon's fine....Yeah well I was really expecting catfish but if that's all you have.... Yeah, well it's tomorrow so it'll have to be fine....Yeah, ok. Well thanks, yeah see ya tomorrow. Yep, 10:00. Okay, bye. (Hits "End Call," speaking to group) Is it really so hard to have catfish?

ANNA: Salmon's nice too though hun. And you didn't give them much notice.

BRIDGET: Yeah, still. Your wedding's kinda the day you expect to go perfectly.

MARIE: (teasing) That's pretty traditional coming from you.

SOPHIE: Well, when you are Mrs Matthew Hudson you can write them a very elegant complaint letter on the joint stationery I bought you as a wedding gift.

BRIDGET: (With a frown) Sophie, can you stop with the "Mrs Hudson" stuff, please?

MATTHEW: (with a matching frown) Um, maybe this isn't the best time, but why the sudden anti-Mrs Hudson crap?

BRIDGET: (looks at MATTHEW) It isn't crap Matt. And I just don't see the point, it's so—old-fashioned.

MATTHEW: Yeah, but it's only a joke. And you're going to be Mrs Hudson tomorrow so what's the harm?

BRIDGET: Um, no I won't. I'm not changing my name.

MATTHEW: Wait, what?

BRIDGET: I'm not! Why should I have to give up my name?

• ♪ •

MATTHEW: Wait, why haven't we discussed this before?!

BRIDESMAIDS: (exchange nervous looks)

BRIDGET: Why's this such a big deal, if you can't understand something so important—

MATTHEW: (cuts her off) I get that it's your name and you like to be independent and whatever, that's great. But I kind of expected you to take my name when we married. You know, like in a normal marriage?

DOROTHY: (sharply) Matthew!

MATTHEW: So people you know, recognize that we're married! And what about for the kids!

BRIDGET: Kids?! We're not even married yet and you're talking about kids?! What, do you expect me to just become your broodmare—

ANNA: Bridget....

BRIDGET: No Mom! This is important to me, it's my life too! (sounding close to tears now) Matt, this isn't something I'm

willing to compromise on.

MATTHEW: So how come this is the first I've heard of it?!

BRIDGET: I—I don't know! It just never came up; it's always something I've planned to do—

MATTHEW: Well, thanks for letting your future life partner know!

BRIDGET: (loudly, louder than she means to) Well, thanks for not joining the 21st Century!

MATTHEW: (looking wounded, speaks softly) Bridget....come on, this is silly. Let's just talk, please.

BRIDGET: You know what, it's MY name. I don't see what there is to discuss.

MATTHEW: Only our future life together!

BRIDGET: (quietly, sounding disappointed) Not now Matt (she stands up, pushing past him)

MATTHEW: (starting to sound desperate) Then when?!

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BRIDGET: I—you know what I don't know right now (she walks to the door and slips out)

ANNA: (stands and anxiously follows her daughter out the door)

BRIDESMAIDS: (Panic-stricken and clearly uncomfortable)

MATTHEW: (throws up his hands in a gesture of helplessness before dragging them through his hair, ruffling it. He looks at the silent people in the room. Speaking defensively) What?

[MATTHEW's phone starts ringing]

MATTHEW: (With a sigh, slips his phone out of his pocket to answer it) What, man?Yeah, I think we'll be leaving a bit later.... No, I can't be ready now....It's—it's complicated (ends call).

CURTAIN

Game of Life

• ✧ •

Victoria Jackson

Zahira stared blankly at the white ceiling, wondering if this is what her life had amounted to—an empty hospice room without any signs of visitors and nothing but pure whiteness. She decided she hated the color white. She didn't see any pureness or innocence in the color; it was just the color of pretense. A lie. It made you think that everything was okay and things were simple and clean, but just like a two faced liar the more you looked at it the more you saw it slip up and make mistakes. The white now wasn't so pure, it was fading yellow and had other stains surrounding it. Stains that people had tried so hard to get out but couldn't quite remove the harm it left behind. She hated the color white.

Zahira laughed. How pathetic was she? Her last days and she was thinking about the paint of the walls. She laughed again.

"Someone's feeling better, aren't

you Zaaaheera?" One of the numerous nurses said, walking in with more white sheets.

Zahira also hated the way they pronounce her name, elongating the syllables. Za.Here.A. Was that so hard?

"Just... peachy." She really needed to stop thinking about colors.

The nurse smiled, like that was the greatest news she ever heard. Then again, since the nurse worked at such a gloomy hospice it really could have been the greatest news. Most of the other patients there had already given up on life one way or another. Zahira was the youngest there, only twenty one to their late forties and up, so even dying she was still more active than most. "I'm sure your parents will be so happy to see you feeling better." "Yeah. Right." Like that would ever happen. Her mother was too

• ✧ •

hung up over her new husband; she couldn't spare a single moment to be with anyone else but him.

"And maybe you can finally go see your sister again. Amanda was it? Amandy?"

Zahira's eyes widen and she clenched her fist tight. "Amani. Not Amanda or Amandy. A. Man. EE. Why can't you get any of our names right!"

"I-I didn't mean to offend."

"Well you did. Do you think that you could just get away with pronouncing my name wrong every day and then bring her up? Don't you know anything?!" Zahira grabbed her pillow and hugged it tight to her chest. "Aren't you suppose to learn our names and find out what makes us tick? Huh? Why aren't you doing your job?"

The nurse was flabbergasted. "I think it's time you had breakfast and some of your medications." She turned her back to grab a glass of orange juice and one of the pills from the tray.

"I don't want your crummy breakfast or your medication!" Zahira was so angry that she threw her pillow at the nurse, knocking the glass out of her hand. Zahira took sick pleasure of hearing the glass shatter against the floor. "See nothing lasts in this place for long. We all break eventually!"

She laughed gleefully at the absurdity of the situation; broken glass should not be funny. Or the thought of dying. But she was dying anyway and there was nothing they could do about it. No way to fix the problem. They could only pretend that everything was okay, but she didn't want to pretend anymore.

The nurse tried to ignore the laughing girl and bent down to pick up the large fragments with a napkin, then tossed them aside on the cart.

"Are you just going to toss me aside too when I break?"

"You aren't an object to throw away Zahe... Zahira."

"But I'm something that's going



to break." She laughs again. "Or am I something that's already breaking?"

The nurse gets up and dust off her clothes. "I think the doctor might want to have a word with you."

"Dr. Carter?"

"No, not that doctor. Dr. Thiel, the psychologist."

"You think I'm crazy?"

"I think that you are going through some very hard things at a young age and you need someone to talk to."

"I'm not "going through some very hard things". I'm dying. There's a big difference!" Zahira hated when they pulled that act, made it sound like she just had the flu or going through a tough break up. Those were things you would eventually get over. There was no getting over dying. Once you died, you were done. There was no coming back.

The nurse just looked at her sadly. "Dr. Thiel is amazing. I'm sure you'll like her and find her comforting."

"Great, I'm sure we'll be bonding over broken glass in no time."

"That's the attitude." The nurse chirped, trying to get out of the room as fast as she could.

Zahira was glad to see her go but bemoaned the fact that now she had to talk to a shrink. She slide lower into her bed and held her left wrist up in front of her ace so that she could get a better glimpse of the bracelet on it. It was the cheap, homemade kind. The type little kids made at camp that spelled out their names on tiny blocks. A.M.A.N.I. That was what was hers spelled. It was childish but Amani use to wear the bracelet all the time and it made Zahira feel close to her.

Amani was ten years younger than her, which made Zahira feel more like a mother to her instead of just an older sister. Poor little Amani. They always said that cancer could be hereditary, but it was so rare for it to hit siblings around the same time. Just misfortune and bad genes, some of the doctors said. Zahira had another



theory and she blamed her step-father for their sickness. When her mother remarried and they moved into his one bedroom home, he convinced her mother that her daughters could live comfortably in the attic for the time being. It was perfectly safe. Yeah right. She had a feeling that the paint in that room was lead, but no one listened to her. A year later and both her sister and her were diagnosed with cancer.

Zahira was lucky to have been older, diagnosed at the age of 17 whereas poor Amani was just 7. The chemotherapy actually helped her for a little bit, but the chemo was too much for Amani's frail system and she died a couple of years after treatment. Zahira was going to follow her soon. After four years of being off and on chemo, her body had finally stopped responding to it. There was nothing left to do now but just let the cancer run its natural course. And no one wanted to have their daughter die under their roof, least of all watch it happen for a second time, so her ever loving mother shipped her off to the cheapest hospice in the area. Nothing but the best for Zahira.

Zahira stroked the beads, wishing with all of her heart that she was just having a horrible nightmare and that when she woke up this would all have been a crazy dream and Amani would still be sharing a room with her. But life didn't work that way. No matter how hard you wished for things, it would never come true. Life was cruel game and she just happened to have a shitty draw.

She sighed, not wanting to have to face the shrink later. The shrink wouldn't tell her anything that she didn't already know; she was just going to help her "find peace" with such a grave situation. Sure, easy for the shrink to say. It was much harder to practice what you preached when you still had a full life ahead of you. What about Zahira? She was twenty-one and she'd never have the experience of going to a bar and getting drunk. Or go to any fun parties and get caught up in semi-illegal things. Hell, she wouldn't even lose her virginity. Not that she wanted to do all of those things, but still it would be nice to have the options like everyone else.



It wasn't even that Zahira was afraid of dying. Not really. She was just more outraged at the unjustness of it all. It wasn't fair that she and Amani had to go through this. Even more unfair that her mother wasn't there for any of it. It just... stunk that she was losing the game of life so badly.

The Legacy of A Chestnut Tree

• ✧ •

Katelyn Lucas

Sixteenth century, northern Pennsylvania: the landscape is bountiful and lush with the all-encompassing shades of green and brown that pleasure the eyes as if they just leaped off a painter's palette. The zest of life and untouched wilderness is palpable in the air. Here, freedom is not some childish clichéd phrase: it is an essence of being, and its value is not so easily forgotten as every creature here fights the magnanimous battle of life and death, hour by hour.

A black haired girl spiritedly runs through the woods with all the agility of a jungle cat, cradling a basket of luscious red raspberries in her arms. The tassels dangling from her deerskin dress tickle her legs in the breeze as her long, loose hair whips around her face like a tornado. They call her "red skinned", those invaders who will come from the East, but today the troubles of the future could

not be further from her mind. On her journey back through the woods to her Iroquois village, she pauses to admire a newly sprouted sapling peeking out of the fertile earth. She gently caresses its young, vibrant green leaves, identifying with the vitality and purity of its youth. She was taught to value all forms of life, knowing everything has a purpose, and she fondly pictures the sapling growing up tall and strong like its kin around it. One day its job will also be to sustain the forest with its abundant fruit: the chestnut. The chestnut is an essential source of life in this place, connecting all creatures in the food chain with its invaluable boon. Without it, who knows what could happen to this wondrous ecosystem? For now this sapling is content to simply marvel in the innocence of its infancy and learn to grow under the watchful eyes of its elders.

• ✧ •

The chestnut trees are always watching.

1681, William Penn founds the Pennsylvania colony. The intruders from the East have arrived with their massive machines that float on water and their weapons that spout fire and black smoke like demonic spirits from hell. As our chestnut sapling grows so do development, industry, and humankind. Innocence is lost as the ominous foreboding of change drawing ever nearer lingers in the air like a dense fog. It strikes fear in the innocent souls of the native inhabitants of the woods. To the beat of the drum they dance and seek guidance from their great spirits. To the beat of the drum their hearts endure together despite the dread disrupting the rhythm. Thump thump. Thump thump. Thump. Looking closely, one can notice the slight stir of the chestnut leaves in the forest as if moved by a nonexistent wind. They tremble in unison.

The chestnut trees are always watching.

1776, the American Revolution is won, and the once prodigious and powerful Native American

Iroquois Nation is crumbling due to the white man's intrusion. The little black haired girl whose spirit was intertwined with those Pennsylvania woods has grown and passed on long ago, leaving behind only her descendants to fight a losing battle for a dying way of life. Her sapling, now an adolescent tree, silently takes vigil over the ever-changing land. Does it remember that little girl with the red berries who stroked its fledgling leaves so long ago? Does it mourn for the loss of the native tribes that peacefully coexisted in its woods for so many years? Does it fear for the future? Does it foresee what is to come?

The chestnut trees are always watching.

1904, the fungus Chestnut Blight is introduced to North America. Many years after the long introspective life of our sapling chestnut tree has been abruptly struck down for lumber, its descendants are now in jeopardy just like the little black haired girl's. The fungus devours a majority of the chestnut trees and mankind ravages the survivors. These

magnificent beings, teeming with life and visions of the wonders of the past, are nonchalantly sawed, cut and tossed aside with the care of child throwing away a forlorn toy. Pennsylvania's woods are no longer lush and untamed; houses, factories and cities have taken over like a swarm of nosy and perturbing locusts, smothering the wild and untamed beauty right out of land. But the few remaining chestnut trees still keep watch doing the best they can to provide for the dying world around them.

Like the omnipresent eye of a protective parent, the chestnut trees are always watching, immobilized witnesses of their children dying around them.

1950, the American Chestnut almost disappears from Pennsylvania's woods. There are only a few chestnut trees still standing keeping watch, the equivalent of the last Truffula tree of the Lorax. Who will speak out for the destruction of the trees that have no voice? Is there no one left with a desire to protect the commonwealth of the environment for the future? Do the trees know their despair and helplessness, cringing at the

thought of this injustice?

Not graced with the power and curse that is speech, the chestnut trees have no choice but to morosely endure and mutely watch over their woods as they always have, powerless to take action as their world is shaken.

Present day, Pennsylvania: an old woman takes a walk through a familiar wooded park near her home as the dark hands of dusk begin to steal away the last remnants of light from the sky. It is a cool autumn night and the wind nips at her exposed skin, which is not as resistant to the chill as it used to be. The debris of fallen leaves coats the ground like a scratchy blanket, crunching under her feet as she ambles along. She is alone; her husband has passed and her children, now adults, are busy living their still seemingly infinite lives. She remembers walking her children through these very same woods when they were young, teaching them the names of the trees as they obliviously trampled through the dead leaves having a grand old time, blissfully ignorant. She marvels at the folly of

the young, their ability to take pleasure in such simple things, and how quickly time passes and she abruptly stops in her tracks. Before her stand two impressive trees, now almost full grown, that she planted as mere saplings when each of her children was born: American chestnuts.

The sight of these trees invokes memories of the blood of the woman's Iroquois ancestors that runs in her veins, and she stands there in silence, mourning for a time she never knew when the forests were pure and untamed, bountiful and full of untainted life. She longed to run through those ancient forests among the watchful eyes of the chestnut trees where her people used to live and know true freedom, un-plagued by the corruption of society.

The natural descendants of the formerly magnificent chestnut forests that once covered Pennsylvania are now but sickly parodies of a forgotten past, the gene pool of the tree species having been so depleted and perverted by selective logging and the vicious fungus Chestnut Blight. She fears that there are not enough chestnuts left keeping

vigil on this ever-changing world, not near enough left to provide for the future. Her only consolation is that her chestnuts have grown beautifully, tall and strong. At least they will leave a legacy for the future.

She tenderly procures three more chestnut seeds from the deep crevice of her pocket to plant in honor of her grandchildren. She wistfully stares at her open palm, the rich brown of the seeds strikingly contrasting with the pale, wrinkled skin of her hand. There's no escaping the vicissitudes of time.

If for nothing else, her chestnut trees will always be watching.

“Colors, like features, follow
the changes of the emotions.”

✧ *Pablo Picasso*





Which Way is Up? ♪ Erika Klemp





Out of the Sand & Jenna Krebs

Untitled & Kelly Parsons

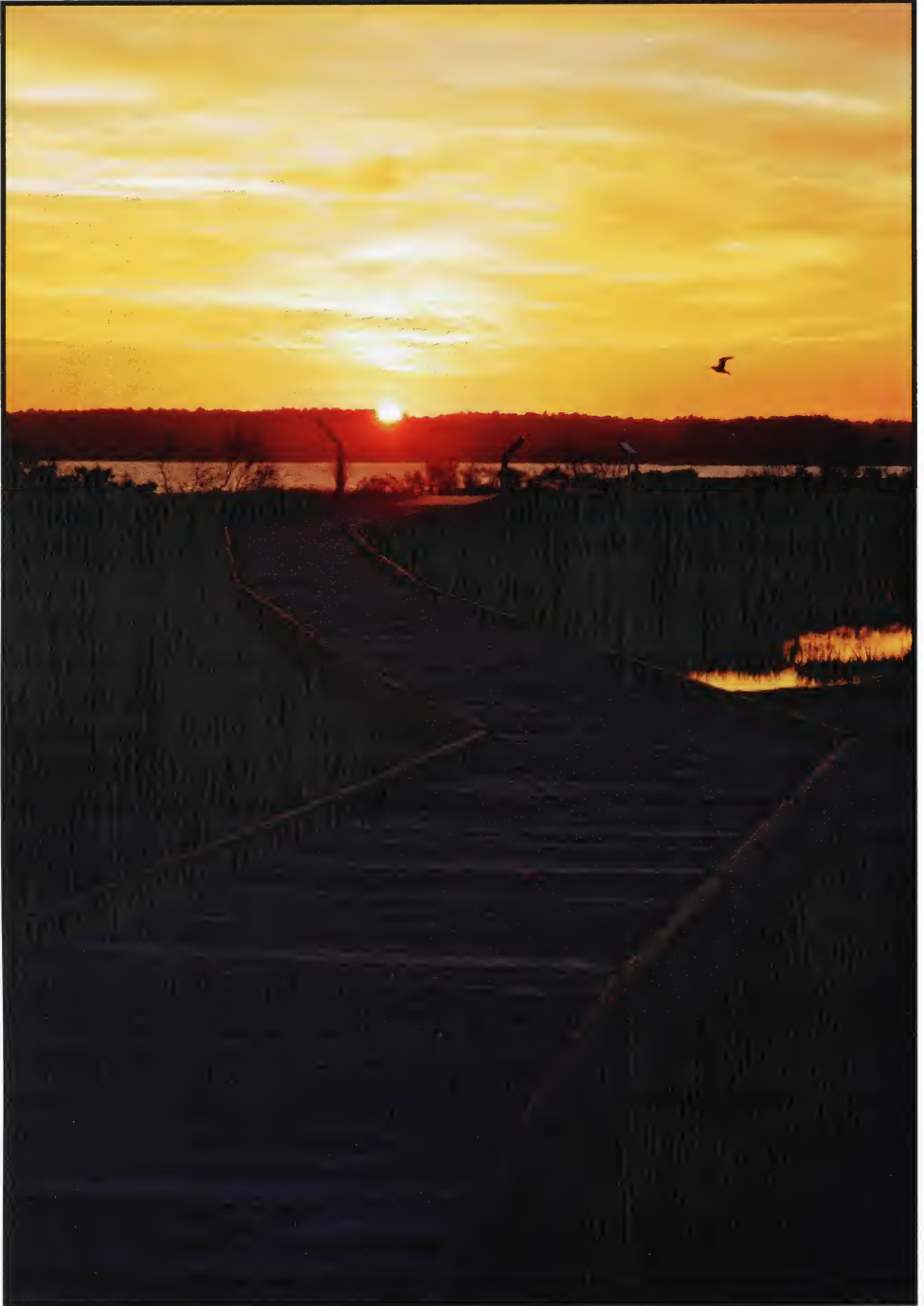




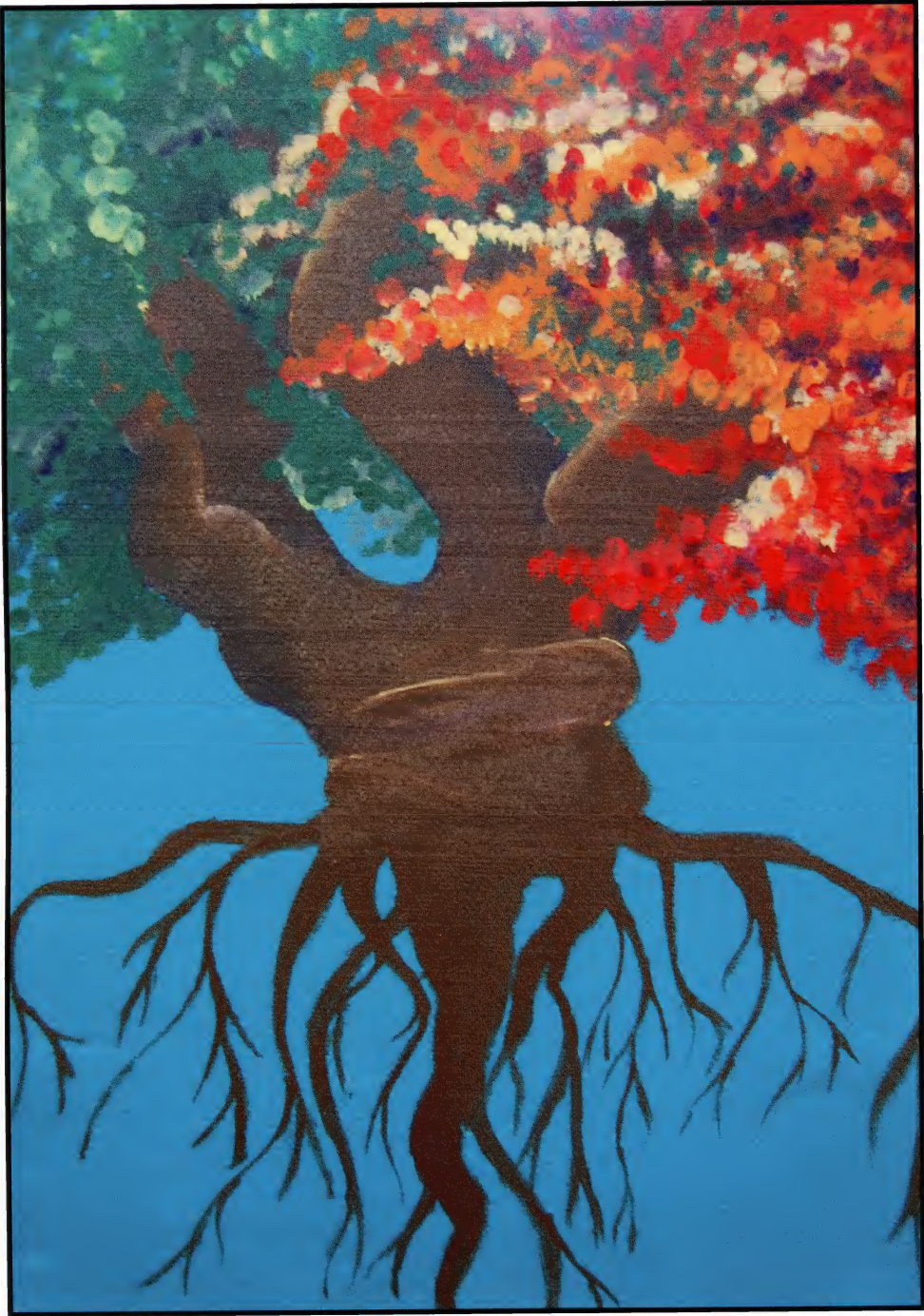
In Sadness There Can Be Beauty ♡ Jenna Krebs

Untitled ♡ Abbie Branchflower

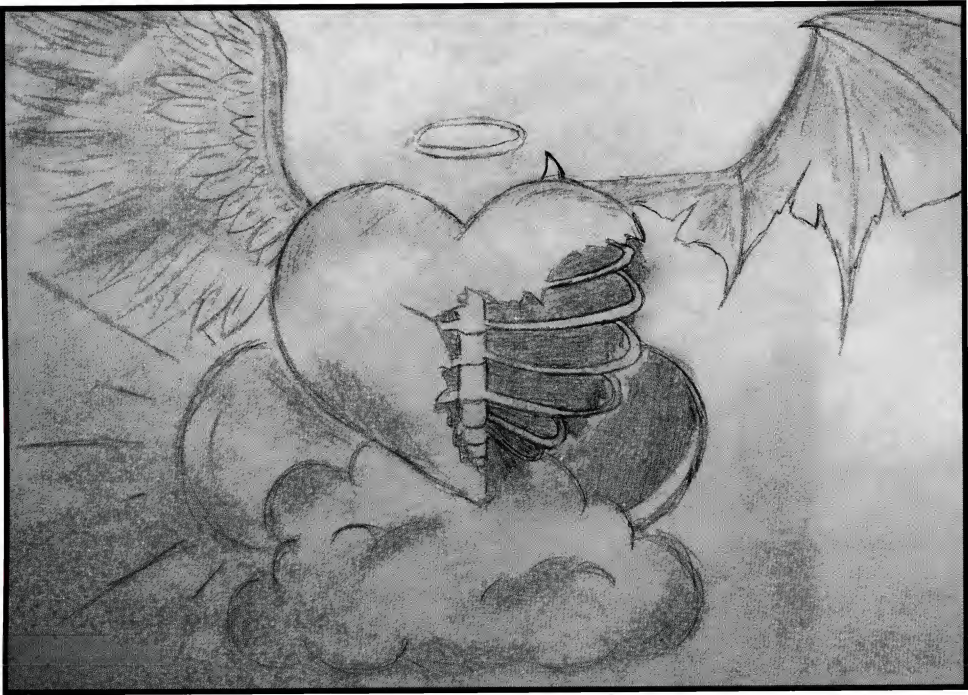




Untitled *℘* Heather Vorwerk





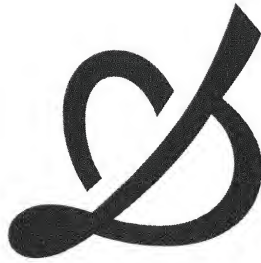






“Every generation needs
a new revolution.”

Thomas Jefferson



The high school writing competition is an annual venue for writers attending local high schools in the Pennsylvania region.

First and second place prizes are awarded for the categories of poetry and prose in two class groups: 9th through 10th grade and 11th through 12th grade.



First Place Poetry

[57] A Changing World

Second Place Poetry

[58] Metamorphosis

First Place Prose

[59] Saving Yourself

Second Place Prose

[62] Transformation

A Changing World

• ✎ •

Hannah Cohen

Delaware Valley Regional High School, Mrs. Civitillo

As a little girl
I thought my room was immense.
The ceiling so high
The wall design- a picket fence

My room was my sanctuary
My dolls I adored
So much to play with
No chance I'd be bored.

High school came quickly
Hours on the phone
In my room for privacy
I'd speak in low tone.

College went fast
I moved back in my room.
But something was different
It felt like a tomb.

My room was tiny
An odd transformation.
Everything shrunk!
A strange accusation.

As I walked outside
I thought I was deranged,
But then I realized
It was me who had changed.

• ✎ •

Metamorphosis

• ✎ •

Brendan Wetmore

Wilson High School, Mrs. Ninfo

Looking into the reflective space,
I see this beauty is displaced.
They say I'm not "man enough".
I don't stick around when things get tough.
They are right, but also wrong.
A man! I do not belong.
However, I stick around for those I love.
From the day when my dad gave me a glove,
I knew that the mitt would never fit.
Being male is something I'd quit,
Being a woman is my dream.
No matter how far-out it may seem,
This is my everyday reality.
My patriarchs question the morality
Of being transgender.
I always was a rule-bender.
But only I can choose a path.
My only request is that I don't feel the wrath
That transitioning may bring.
I just want to hear the angelic choirs sing,
Welcoming me to womanhood.

• ✎ •

Saving Yourself

• ✎ •

Megan Seyler

Wilson High School, Mr. Dudek

You grow bitter with age. Each year, a larger part of you frays away, like the shedding of skin, and it's so subtle that it goes unnoticed.

You begin as fresh as a rising sun. You are three years young, full of giggles and scraped elbows, toddling along with the vague familiarity of living. You dance of your dad's toes and ride down the five-foot-slide in your back yard. Life is a crumpled bunch of forgotten yesterday's that blur to this very moment.

Time has shifted, but you're much too busy to take notice. Growing up is a tenuous task. Valentine's Day passed and you gave out cards to every person in your first grade class. The boy with the round blue eyes tried to hold your hand. You've not any time to think about boys, or anything really, for being young is much

too momentous in the scheme of things. You're learning to read and how not to spill your cereal all over the table. You wear your brand new pair of bright red sneakers with your blonde hair loosely in pigtails. On your sixth birthday, you grin as you blow out your sparkly candles, one tooth missing, your mom holding your baby brother on her lap. Everyone is awake.

Summer is dawning – the flowers in your front yard are sprouting almost as fast as your legs. The night sky is as clear as it always was, the air as warm as it always should be. You lay where your old slide once sat, now a square patch of dead grass, and watch the amiable stars stay happily in their place. Next door, you hear your best friend arrive home. She's curly-haired and bright-eyed and wears a lot of plastic rings on

• ✎ •

her tiny fingers. You wonder why your dad hasn't been at dinner lately or why your mom takes so many naps. "I'll always be here for you," you tell your little brother, freshly five, as he drifts off to sleep. You've been alive for almost a decade – don't you have it all figured out by now?

Life begins to unfold before your innocent eyes. The world is muddled, like a swamp, a spherical blur of smudges and fog. You tuck your long honey hair behind your ear and let out a long breath. Tears well in your chocolaty brown eyes as you stare at your reflection, a shaking hand covering the imperfections of your stomach. You hear your mom and dad fighting in the kitchen - their words vile and cruel. Barely thirteen, and you're already worried, wishing you could still fit on the tips of your dad's toes. Metal braces line your teeth, tight jeans slim your legs, black mascara coats your lashes. Who are you? You want to answer, but you simply can't find the words upon your tongue.

It's your sixteenth February, and you're so busy trying to be happy that you don't even

see the calendar deteriorate. You keep yourself busy as you grow inwards, like the roots of a tree. You don't give any valentines, though the blue-eyed-boy still smiles at you when you pass in the hall. Waking up in the morning is becoming unbearable, for sleeping proves a much easier task than being fully 'here'. With hair chopped short and self-esteem diminished, you don't recognize yourself. And so, you down your very first shot of vodka and chase it with dusty memories, and chase the next with nothing at all.

Staring in an old photo album, shivers rake through your tired body. Six-year-old you stares back - smile goofy, eyes bright, posing in your old red sneakers. You can't remember being her. You sit, numb and alone, in your college dorm, listening to your ex-boyfriend's favorite song. It turned out that the blue-eyed-boy wasn't interested in you so much as the curve of your hips and the length of your legs. The phone rings beside you, an irritating shrill. It's your not-so-little brother on the other line, his voice being deeper than you



remembered. "Mom's on her fifth glass of wine," he tells you. "Dad just bought a new apartment in the city. Things are okay, I guess, but I wish you were here." Something inside of you snaps as you realize you aren't there for him like you promised. You have stretched your body like a rubber band, prodded it like cork, and left it in tatters.

The sky is dark - a canvas of navy and speckled light. The aroma of sand and salty water fills your lungs. You lay on a crimson blanket, soft and light, hugging you from underneath. Your fiancé sits beside you, tracing circles in your palm, and life suddenly seems much less clamorous. He proposed to you hours before in the silence of the nighttime. Three years ago, you were ready to let yourself go, until a brown-haired-boy offered you his coat in the pouring rain. Hundreds of kisses later, you're lighter than air, and you don't remember exactly how you became so sad. Your brother graduates high school this Spring. Mom began getting up in the mornings - she's been sober for eleven months. Dad has a new girlfriend that is just as kind as he is. You ran into

your best friend last year at a concert. She stills wears a lot of rings and has a lot of freckles. You recently changed your major to Astronomy, in light of a new part of you that is just awakening from its slumber. Somehow, after all those years, you realized the one person that could save you was yourself.

You grow bitter with age and you also grow stronger. Each year, a larger part of you frays away, and an even larger part patches you back up. It all goes unnoticed, until one morning you wake up and realize that it isn't so hard anymore. It all becomes worth it.



Transformation

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Samantha Wheeler

Delaware Valley Regional High School, Mrs. Civitillo

We all start out as nothing; we all begin completely nonexistent to the whole world. There was once a time where no one knew that I as a person was going to exist, and the same goes for you. Then all of a sudden, we were all magically brought into this strange world one by one, and suddenly we were known by many, you existed. At the moment that you take your very first breath of air, you have finished the first of millions of transformations that will occur in your lifetime. You transformed from a mere nothing into a living and breathing human being, and now you are to go through the largest cycle imaginable that will change your appearance, feelings, knowledge, and more, this cycle is called life.

Childhood, this is one of the most precious times in your life. This is the time where we

go from crawling to walking, from listening to speaking, from watching to doing, and so on. As children, we grow everyday, always learn new words, meet new friends, and growing smarter and smarter. When we are young, is when we learn most of our life lessons. For example, I am sure we all learned not to touch a hot stove the hard way when we were younger, and probably many more silly things that we now know not to do. I think being a younger child is the best possible time, because ignorance is bliss and our thoughts have yet to be altered by society. We are going through so many changes, however, none of us realized it at the time. For example, were not concerned about how "unattractive" we looked when we would lose a tooth, or constantly worry if we "gained 5 pounds." As kids, we

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believed that as long as we were happy with ourselves everything with great, however our thoughts slowly begin to change as we grow older.

Teenage years, these are some of the best and some of the worst years of our lives. We have transformed greatly since childhood, and not always necessarily in a good way. We have stopped living to please ourselves and started to try to please others instead. All of our goals pretty much include trying to look like some Photoshopped celebrity, getting the boy/girl they like to go out with them, to not fail school, and to make ourselves look better than the person next to us. For teenagers, life revolves around "who is hot, and who is not." Society has given us images of "perfect" celebrities and has transformed our mindsets into believing that that is what we must all look like, so we transform ourselves. Girls load on makeup and spend hours on picking out their clothes so they can try to change their appearance into something you'd see on a magazine because that is what they believe they must do.

However, if you think back 5 years ago, we were all as happy as can be without doing our hair or makeup and just wearing a T-shirt and jeans. No one can escape the media because it is everywhere that we look and society has sucked us all into their trap and has completely changed our mind sets. As teenagers our bodies have matured, our hearts have been broken, our mindsets have been changed, and our knowledge has increased. However once high school and collage are over, you are going to think back and realize that it never mattered what gossip some one started about you or how much you regret wearing those shoes with that shirt, the thing that is going to matter most is what you learned. Knowledge sticks with you forever and it is the one thing that will help you most when you make the transformation into the next stage of your life, adulthood.

In elementary school they prepare you for middle school, in middle school they prepare you for high school, in high school they prepare you

for collage, and in collage they prepare you for the real world, and now you are here. Once you turn 21, you start the first day of the rest of your life. You don't have guidance councilors to help you with your problems, you don't get a weekly syllabus to tell you what to do anymore, you are completely on your own. There is so much pressure on young adults today. You have to of course have fun, however you cannot have too much fun or else you will never be able to get a good job. You have to find your perfect match whom you will spend the rest of your life with however; you are not allowed to go from person to person without being judged. You have to find a house that you can start a family in, however it has to be within your budget. There are so many things to do with so little time to actually do it. Barley 10 years ago you had someone taking care of you, but now you have no one to rely on except yourself. So this is the real world, isn't it great?

You finally have figured out this whole adulthood thing. You now know how to pay taxes, cook, do laundry, clean,

etc. However, it seems as if you are beginning to slow down, it seems as if you don't have the energy to do these everyday things that were once so easy to do. You have reached the last stage of you're life, your "golden years." You have stopped worrying about having the "cutest clothes" or how great your makeup looks, you now have only one concern, your own well being. Your body has transformed and you are now weak and frail. There was once a time where you could wake up and run around from dusk until dawn, now you can barely leave your bed. The older you get, the worse things become and suddenly, you transform back into nothing. You are dead.

Someday, when your life is flashing before your eyes, I hope you see no regrets. Everyone should be spontaneous, be forgiving, be able to always smile, and most of all be able to make yourself happy. In life, many things change, however it is up to you to take control and make the best of the changes. The world cannot change us unless we

allow it to do so. The power of change is in our hands, use it to make yourself happy because in the end, who's left? You.



First Place Poetry

[67] I Used to Live

Second Place Poetry

[69] Griffonage

First Place Prose

[70] Ellis

Second Place Prose

[74] My Model U.N. Experience



I Used to Live

• ✎ •

Rika Hoffman

Bayard Rustin High School, Mrs. Tyson

I Used to Live
In a room with two walls.
They were parchment white,
Bound by glue,
And wallpapered with fields,
Neat rows of ink.

Each splotch of black was a seed
Which sprouted and flourished
Into words, twisting like ivy.
I untangled them
And savored
What the gardener had grown.

Gradually, my hands that held the walls apart
Turned parchment white.
Then I dissolved into the wall,
Content to be there,
Hanging, just a fixture of the room
Until awoken by the snap of the door.

I am released.
My hair and nails have grown long.
There are lines under my eyes
Like the creases of dog-eared pages.
I put the book aside
And pick up another.

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Time passes,
Measured not by a clock's tock.
I age by the swish of pages
Though my back has lost its hunch.
My spine is stiff, straight and strong.
A hand reaches out to stroke it.

I am grasped in a grip
Tight as a tourniquet.
Swish, swish, swish...
Ransacked by furious, prying claws
I scream,
Spilling my guts all at once.

My door slams.
I guess my tenant didn't like the décor,
Or my tendency to ramble and preach.
I am starting to feel closed-
Minded. I will try
To be more hospitable in the future.

I am a room with two walls
Up for rent.

Griffonage

• ✍ •

Gabriella Calcavecchio

Delaware Valley Regional High School, Ms. Morton

When I cracked open my chest
and let you peek inside to see my heart –
pumping heart-shaped red blood cells all throughout my body
(and beating extra fast because you were right there) –
Well, I just want you to know that you were the first.

I gently handed you the needle and bottle of ink
and closed my smiling eyes while you tattooed that heart of mine.
It didn't even hurt – well, not really.
Embracing every dip and swirl of your pen,
I imagined the ode with which you professed your endless love to
me.
So personal. So permanent. So... naïve.

You sure got away quick.

You should know that when I finally built up the courage
to stand bare before the mirror and look upon your masterpiece,
I didn't cry.
In fact, I cocked my head to the side, squinted a little harder,
because I could not possibly read what you wrote.
I think that was the moment I realized you never really cared.

Call it chicken scratch or call it poor penmanship,
It doesn't change the fact
that I still have no idea what that scrawl is trying to tell me
with every single pulse.
That formless, shapeless, meaningless scribble – I feel it.
And it hurts.

• ✍ •

Ellis

• ✧ •

Sarah Gow

Kutztown High School, Ms. Westgate

"You're a Capricorn too,"
The man smiled and nodded,
leaning in close so she could
smell the light scent of flowers
and asphalt the emanated from
him.

"I am..." She sighed and
looked straight out the window
to see the passing concrete on
the wall of the subway. Spray-
paint prophecies flashed before
and then retreated again into
the hollow corridors where the
trains somberly slithered.

She pulled her messenger
bag to her chest and posed her
feet closer together as if crawling
into herself. Her boots had
patterns inside that looked like
tribal weaving and the outside's
leather cover hugged her feet
protectively. Grey knitted socks
over-flowed from the brims of
her boots and onto her jeans.
Fingerless gloves harbored her

hands that fumbled with her
iPhone.

The man drew back; his
white hair splashing in waves
from his maroon hat.

"That means that the
day ahead will be good to us,
unlike the past few," His smile
was rosebudded.

She looked up from her
glasses' rims.

"You look beautiful in
these lights... There! The next
part of your horoscope is true!
More people want to give you
compliments, they're just shy."

The car was empty and
each thump of the train on the
tracks nudged her.

He slid gently closer as
the train pulled into the stop at

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Times Square where all the trains seemed to meet up to share secrets in sighs.

Doors slid open.

She stared out the window of the train still, to see the sauntering of the station. Rustic walls framed the inhabitants. A man was humming to sleep with a violin playing him, while a woman older than her age curled a scarf around her face to hold her eyelids shut. The lights never went out on the subway.

"It's a new day," He mused, "And a new place."

Doors shut.

The train started again entering the hollows.

"Are you scared of me dear?"

"It's late."

"It's early to someone else."

"It's late to me," Her coffee colored lips dropped the words like weights.

"Can I see your hand?"

She didn't speak, but put her phone in her pocket to open her palm to him.

She looked up to read the advertisement that hung right across from her.

It read, "It's Never To Late To Get Where You're Going" and under it in smaller letter it mumbled about New York public transit.

His fingernails were filed down so that his nails were tiny circles. Fingers chalky and brittle, he peeled off her glove to reveal her soft skin. Nails painted a subdued dark-teal, they were cold and trembling.

Trying not to touch her hand too much he traced the lines only with the rough tip of his index finger.

"Take advantage of the joys ahead, don't scrutinize or analyze anything farther what you can see. Your name is Ellis is it not? The city wears it like a welcome mat for you."

Her eyes perked up and she drew her hand back.

"You took the Ferry over?"

She nodded.

"It runs all night like the subway," His eyes glittered in the blinking train's light, "And there's always someone on it."

She closed her eyes and forced them open again.

"Where do you get off?"

"Cathedral Parkway..."
She slipped her glove back on.

"Have you been here?"

"Not since I was three..."

She moved something in her pocket.

"How long you been traveling to get here, your eyes hold mountains?"

"Long enough... I left my parent's house last night and I've been moving ever since."

"Sleep and I'll wake you up at your stop."

She shook her head with an unintended scowl that held instilled cautions.

Sleep whispered to her in lullabies and enveloped her body. The seat pulled down on her body, it was a mattress. Her body went limp and swayed more willingly with the locomotive.

Her eyelids shook slightly with nightmares and dreams till her mouth finally opened to breathe in the frightfully foreign air until she smelled like flowers and asphalt too.

Someone shook her and she leapt up in an instant, having not felt her bag in her lap and jumping to the conclusion that it was gone with the man.

Her face was touched by red as she saw it sitting patiently in the seat where the man had sat before. A tired voice on the intercom sighed, "Cathedral

Parkway at 100 Broadway.”

She left the train
hesitantly and before she could
turn around it pulled away
empty.

My Model U.N. Experience

• ✎ •

Mia Smeraglia

North Hunterdon High School, Mrs. Fedorko

I'm standing in front of a room full of strangers. My heart throbs in my throat, blocking out the words they're waiting for me to say. My skin glistens with faint evidence of a cold sweat. My hands tremble as if an earthquake was coursing through my veins. I feel the crimson burn spreading across my face like a wild fire. The crowd of teenagers sitting before me becomes distorted by their serious faces and stiff, awkward business clothes; of course my left eye's uncontrollable twitch couldn't have helped. Finally, I open my mouth and struggle through my assigned part. It was a complete and total mess, a jumble of "um"s and bumbling pauses. After what seemed like an eternity of standing up at the podium, we finally put my group's resolution to a vote. Surprisingly it passed despite my floundering interference. For the rest of that session of committee I

sat, watched the clock, listened, doodled, and raised my placard when it was necessary to vote, but I didn't dare attempt to speak again. Eventually as lunch approached committee drew to a close. Following tradition, our committee chair took those last five inescapable minutes to read us the character development acknowledgments. They're basically compliments written out on scraps of paper, sometimes with inside jokes or little cartoons. I was only half listening, mostly thinking about lunch and telling my friends about my embarrassing blunder, when I heard my country get called.

I looked around as if there was another Nigerian delegate in the room but everyone was looking at me. It was from the delegate from Germany, a confident senior who was always

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raising her placard and offering opinions. The acknowledgement read: "Great job on your first resolution! I can't wait to hear more of your ideas!" It was not much but it was far more than I ever expected. After my earlier train wreck I figured no one would want to work with me for the rest of the conference. I went to lunch feeling proud, showing off my acknowledgement to everyone I encountered. And once committee was back in session I felt ready and confident. I spoke often, approached delegates with resolution ideas, and spoke with a new found boldness; I even received a few more character development acknowledgements. By the end of the conference I was actually mourning the close. This conference had gone from just being a means to skip school to an empowering experience where I found my voice.

When I came back for the second year, I looked around my committee room and spotted a jittery freshman. All the signs were there. Red, blushing cheeks, wide, fear filled eyes, and that constant adjusting of his tie and binder like he had an

itch crawling up and down his skin. It was like a mirror image of what I must have looked like last year. All I could think about was how something so small as a measly complement changed my entire disposition. So I approached the novice delegate and introduced myself. I told him about committee and encouraged him to speak up and how supportive everyone is. Now as a senior I continue my participation in Model U.N., this being my fourth and final year, and I still try to do my part to help others find their own voice. And I realized this attitude didn't have to only apply to Model U.N. I could use the confidence I gained at conference to make a positive impact on others. Whether it means giving a compliment or just saying hi, what you believe to be the simplest efforts can make a world of difference to someone else.

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• ∂ •

COLOPHON

- 27" iMac
- Adobe InDesign CS6, Version 8.0.2
- Printed and Perfect-Bound by Thomson Shore, Inc. Dexter, MI.
 - 450 copies, 80 pages
- Cover: 12pt C1S Gloss Layflat Lamination
- Black and white pages: 70# Huron Matte
 - Color pages: 80# Huron Gloss
- Fonts: Palatino, Futura, Wingdings

*Editors from each category evaluate submissions through
a blind review process.
Bribes accepted.*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Brendan Killackey

Doug McCambridge

Dr. Linda Maisel

Maria Smith

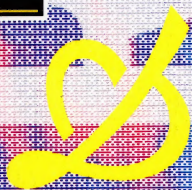
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BROADENING ITS SCOPE
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